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Exploring the Relationship Between Athletic Identity on Certain Coping Mechanisms in Adolescent Athletes

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OBJECTIVE

(1) To describe athletic identity and coping mechanisms in an adolescent athletic population, and (2) to examine the relationship between athletic identity and coping mechanisms in an adolescent population.

DESIGN and SETTING

A cohort study using survey methods to explore athletic identity and coping mechanisms within a large, public Midwestern school district and an elite level youth club soccer academy.

PARTICIPANTS

A convenience sample of healthy 10–19-year-old athletes was recruited. Participants were required to be a member of at least one school sponsored sport in 2020-2021 or a member of an elite soccer academy during 2020-2021. A total of 70 participants (47 males, 23 females) were recruited. The average age was 15.3 ± 1.35 .

INTERVENTION

Using Qualtrics, demographics information was collected and the AIMS-7 (Athletic Identity Measurement Scale, 7 item) and CISS-SSC (Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations – Situation Specific Coping) were administered. The AIMS-7 is a seven-item instrument measured with a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree); it is composed of three subscales: social identity, negative affect and exclusivity. Possible scores range from 7-49. The AIMS-7 was previously validated in an adolescent population and has reported high internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.89$). The CISS-SSC is a 21-item instrument scored with a 5-point Likert

scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree); it is composed of three subscales: task-oriented, emotion-oriented, avoidance-oriented. Participants are labeled as task, emotion or avoidance-oriented based upon their highest subscale score. The CISS-SSC has been validated in an adult population and reports moderate to high internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.70-0.85$).

MAIN OUTCOME MEASURES

Descriptive statistics were calculated for the summated AIMS-7 score and three CISS-SSC subscale scores. Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated between each AIMS-7 subscale and CISS-SSC subscale. Additionally, three independent t-tests were conducted with the independent variable, low, moderate, or high AIMS score, and the dependent variables, avoidance, emotion, or task-focused CISS-SSC score. Alpha level was set at 0.05 for all analyses.

RESULTS

The average AIMS-7 score was 39.47 ± 19.00 . Two correlations were found to be statistically significant. Emotion-focused coping correlated with AIMS exclusivity ($r(70) = 0.41; 0.19, 0.59; p < 0.001$), and emotion-focused coping correlated with AIMS negative affectivity ($r(70) = 0.39; 0.17, 0.57; p < 0.001$). AIMS scores amongst participants were categorized as low ($n=0$), moderate ($n=7$), and high ($n=63$). All elite soccer academy participants scored in the high category. Only emotion-focused coping was statistically different between moderate and high AIMS scores ($t(68)=2.40, p=0.02, g=0.94$).

CONCLUSION

Previous studies in college-aged individuals who were former high school athletes reported an association between emotion-focused coping and high athletic identity scores, specifically within the AIMS exclusivity subscale. This study using adolescent athletes reported similar results, indicating that there was a positive moderate relationship between emotion-focused coping and high levels of athletic identity within the negative affectivity and exclusivity subscales. From the current

results, it appears that adolescents who rely on the least effective coping mechanism, emotion-focused coping, tend to identify most strongly with being an athlete. This can be a concern when stressful situations such as being cut from a team or when injury or illness are encountered. Because the generalizability of this study's results are limited due to its sample size, future research would benefit from completing this study on a larger scale.

KEY WORDS: *Adolescent Athletes, Athletic Identity, Coping, Athletic Identity Measurement Scale, Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations- Situation Specific Coping*